

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
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S E C R E T ADDIS ABABA 11741

EXDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ET, IT

SUBJ: ITALIAN-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS

SUMMARY: ITALIAN AMBASSADOR WHO RECENTLY RETURNED FROM ROME, SAID LONG-PLANNED ITALIAN PROPOSAL FOR HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL MISSION TO ETHIOPIA IN INTERESTS OF IMPROVING BILATERAL RELATIONS IS MOVING AHEAD. BEFORE LEAVING FOR ROME, HOWEVER, AN EPMG CONTACT ASKED HIM TO REQUEST GOI TO PASS MESSAGE TO ERITREAN INSURGENTS RESIDENT IN ITALY, TO EFFECT THAT EPMG WISHED SIT DOWN WITH THEM AND DISCUSS PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF ERITREAN PROBLEM. GOI DOES NOT WANT TO PLAY ROLE OF MEDIATOR AND AUTHORIZED AMBASSADOR ON HIS RETURN TO SAY ONLY THAT GOI WOULD AGREE TO ITALIAN MISSIONS ABROAD PASSING MESSAGE TO LOCAL ERITREAN INSURGENT CONTACTS. ETHIOPIANS SEEM TO HAVE LOST INTEREST, HOWEVER. AMBASSADOR CANNOT FIND ANYONE WHO WANTS TO HEAR GOI REPLY (INCLUDING HIS "CONTACT") DESPITE HIS HAVING RETURNED OVER WEEK AGO. HE THEREFORE NO LONGER KNOWS WHAT TO MAKE OF SITUATION, INCLUDING FUTURE OF MISSION. PROBLEM IS COMPLICATED BY EPMG REFUSAL PERMIT ENTRY OF ITALIAN DIPLOMATIC POUCHES UNINSPECTED. INFO TOLD TO ME IN STRICT CONFIDENCE AND ADDRESSEES SHOULD HOLD IT STRICTLY NOFORN. END SUMMARY.

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1. I CALLED ON ITALIAN AMBASSADOR GUIDI NOV 15 TO INQUIRE ABOUT RESULTS OF CONSULTATIONS HE HAD HAD IN ROME APPROXIMATELY WEEK AGO AND FOUND HIM TO BE A PERPLEXED MAN. ROME HAD CALLED HIM HOME TO DISCUSS A PROPOSED HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL VISIT TO ETHIOPIA THAT HAS BEEN UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR WELL OVER A YEAR. OBJECT OF VISIT WOULD BE TO STRENGTHEN ITALO-ETHIOPIAN TIES, AND DELEGATION WOULD BE PREPARED DISCUSS AREAS OF ASSISTANCE OF INTEREST TO ETHIOPIA AND PROBABLY MAKE SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW ITALY MIGHT BE HELPFUL. PROPOSED VISIT HAS BEEN PUSHED BY GUIDI NOT ONLY IN AN EFFORT IMPROVE BILATERAL RELATIONS, BUT ALSO AS MEASURE OF SUPPORT FOR POSITION OF ITALIAN COMMUNITY IN ETHIOPIA (APPROX 3000 IN ADDIS AREA, 1000 IN ASMARA), AND HAS BEEN UNDER DISCUSSION WITH ETHIOPIANS WHO HAVE BLOWN HOT AND COLD. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, ETHIOPIANS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THEY WOULD BE PLEASED TO HAVE DELEGATION VISIT, AND ITALIANS HAVE BEEN PROCEEDING ACCORDINGLY.

2. EVENING BEFORE LEAVING FOR ROME, GUIDI RECEIVED REQUEST TO MEET WITH A "CONTACT" (HE DID NOT IDENTIFY). "CONTACT" PURPORTEDLY SPOKE FOR EPMG AND ASKED GUIDI TO ASK HIS GOVERNMENT TO PASS WORD THROUGH GOI CONTACTS WITH ERITREAN INSURGENT REPS IN ITALY THAT EPMG WANTED TO DISCUSS ERITREAN SITUATION WITH INSURGENT REPS, PRESUMABLY WITH VIEW TO REACHING PEACEFUL SOLUTION. REQUEST CAUGHT GUIDI BY SURPRISE AND HE PROMISED ONLY TO RELAY IT TO HIS GOVERNMENT. GUIDI TOLD ME REACTION OF HIS GOVERNMENT WAS ESSENTIALLY NEGATIVE -- ITALY WANTS NO PART OF ROLE OF MEDIATOR AND DOES NOT WANT TO DEAL WITH ERITREANS IN ITALY (WHO, ACCORDING GUIDI, NO LONGER HAVE MUCH INTEREST IN ERITREAN PROBLEM ANYWAY, BUT ARE PRINCIPALLY INTERESTED IN TOPPLING PRESENT EPMG (COMMENT - READ SYMPATHIZERS OF ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY). INSURGENTS' ITALIAN CONTACTS ARE MAINLY AMONG MEMBERS OF COMMUNIST PARTY AND "EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS.") GOI ALSO SAW REQUEST AS PRESSURE TACTIC TO INSURE ETHIOPIAN ACCEPTANCE OF POLITICAL MISSION.

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3. ACCORDINGLY, GUIDI WAS AUTHORIZED TO REPLY ONLY THAT GOI WOULD AGREE TO PASS MESSAGE TO INSURGENT GROUPS THROUGH ITALIAN MISSIONS ABROAD. WHEN GUIDI RETURNED TO ETHIOPIA, HOWEVER, EXPECTING HIS "CONTACT" TO ASK HIM IMMEDIATELY FOR GOI'S REPLY, HE FOUND THAT NO ONE, INCLUDING HIS "CONTACT" SEEMED AT ALL INTERESTED. "CONTACT" MERELY TOLD HIM HE WOULD CALL, AND AS OF TIME OF OUR CONVERSATION, ALTHOUGH GUIDI HAS BEEN BACK WELL

OVER WEEK, HE HAS YET TO CONVEY GOI'S RESPONSE. IN VIEW OF NATURE OF REPLY, THIS DOESN'T BOTHER HIM; WHAT DOES CONCERN HIM IS APPARENT SWITCH IN SIGNALS. EITHER EPMG HAS HAD CHANGE OF HEART DURING HIS ABSENCE ABOUT PROSPECTIVE ITALIAN VISIT, OR THERE HAS BEEN SOME DEVELOPMENT RE ERITREAN SITUATION THAT HAS LESSENERED EPMG INTEREST IN GOI GO-BETWEEN ROLE.

4. I MENTIONED RECENT VISIT OF SUDANESE MINISTER ABDULLAHI EL HASSAN AND FORMATION OF FIVE-MAN ERITREAN COMMISSION (ADDIS 11201) AS POSSIBLY GERMANE, SAYING THAT SUDANESE WHO, ACCORDING PRESS, DELIVERED MESSAGE FROM NIMEIRI TO TEFERI BANTE NOV 9, MIGHT HAVE DISCUSSED SOME NEW SUDANESE INITIATIVE, OR FORMATION OF COMMISSION JUST NOW MIGHT POSSIBLY SIGNAL NEW ETHIOPIAN EFFORT OF SOME CONSEQUENCE, BUT ADDED THAT BOTH POSSIBILITIES WERE PURE SPECULATION. WE ALSO SPECULATED THAT SEEMING NON-INTEREST OF ETHIOPIANS IN GOI RESPONSE MIGHT NOT NECESSARILY BE WHAT IT SEEMED, AND THAT ETHIOPIANS MIGHT SIMPLY BE WAITING FOR FONMIN KIFLE WODAJA TO RETURN FROM NEW YORK.

5. NET RESULT OF ALL THIS IS TO LEAVE GUIDI UP IN AIR. POLITICAL MISSION REMAINS IN STATE OF SUSPENDED ANIMATION UNTIL GUIDI CAN FIND SOMEONE TO TALK TO. EPMG INITIATIVE RE ERITREANS NOW BAFFLES HIM, AND WHO PROBLEM IS COMPLICATED BY EPMG ACTION RE DIPLOMATIC POUCHES, SINCE HE BELIEVES ITALY IS STILL BLACKLISTED AND THAT HE MAY NOT BEING POUCHES INTO ETHIOPIA UNINSPECTED. IF POUCH SITUATION CONTINUES AS IT MAY UNTIL JANUARY OR BEYOND, GUIDI SEEMED UNSURE HOW IT WILL IMPACT ON GOI'S ENTHUSIASM FOR POLITICAL MISSION.

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6. GUIDI STRESSED THAT HE HAS NOT REVEALED ANY OF ABOVE (AND MOST PARTICULARLY EPMG ERITREAN INITIATIVE) TO ANYONE ELSE IN ADDIS. ADDRESSEES SHOULD THEREFORE INSURE THAT INFO IS HELD STRICTLY NOFORN.
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